



January 13, 2020

Your Worship and Council:

I am here tonight as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce, and our 340 members from across this municipality, members of diverse size and sector that support the Chamber - by choice - as we proudly stand as the local Voice of Business. Together, these members boast approximately 6,900 employees with families to support, thus representing almost 20% of Chatham-Kent's population. This is certainly a 'voice' to heed. In 2019, we polled our members, and they are ON SIDE to future-focused investment in Chatham-Kent for the overall good of business and community growth.

Here we are in 2020, starting the path of a new decade, and we ask that you, as Council and Leaders of the Municipality, maintain your vision as we forge into the future of Chatham-Kent. For many, many years things have been status quo in terms of growth for this community... on all levels. If change is not pushed to the forefront, we are at risk of further stagnation and lost opportunities; a risk I am confident no one person in this room wishes to see.

If we prioritize regular investment in Capital Projects, successfully execute a refreshed Transportation MasterPlan, and dovetail with an inspired Airport MasterPlan - **What could Chatham-Kent be in the Year 2040?** What positive accomplishments could we, as a united community, be boasting of with decades of positive vision and strategy by Council and partners?

Here is what we would like to celebrate:

- . That Chatham-Kent Municipal Council and Leaders, Chambers, BIA's, developers and valued partners rallied *together* to re-designate and develop lands for use along HWY 401 recognizing the advantages of the new 6 lane highway running through the central expanse of Chatham-Kent.
- . That industry and manufacturers embracing the new Gordie Howe International Bridge found Chatham-Kent ready for growth, and firmly planted their roots abundantly along the Chatham-Kent thoroughfare providing them with the needed close access and faster timelines.
- . Chatham-Kent became a major force, actively competing with larger and growing communities such as London, Brantford and Woodstock. Large-scale investors, commercial businesses, hotels, restaurants and shopping destinations cropped up at the new interchange and overpass that was created at Charing Cross Road. We are thriving – and commerce is steadily growing and flowing both within the municipal borders and outwards from Chatham-Kent.

**How did this happen?** People Took Action. Council stood up to the challenge!

They appealed a new Growth Strategy in order to change the dismal growth trajectory laid out in the Watson Report of 2019. Council created new strategy for the Municipality, looking at short and long-term projects and investment that would pay years of dividends. Stepping out of previous comfort zones, Council members took the stance to debenture a new interchange access for the greater good of future citizens and many generations to come. They recognized the time was now, or possibly.... never.

Council took heed of the collective VOICE of local business, embodied by the Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce 2019 poll. They noted 79% of respondents were in favour of an interchange at Charing Cross Road. Although only 53% businesses saw a direct benefit, Council heard that *overall vision for the community took precedence*. Council listened to comments “It would finally make us a 401 city”; “We need it badly if we are going to grow”; and “...it’s the most straightforward way in if you want people to stop and not just drive by.”

Recognizing 57% of respondents supported an enhanced airport to include flights to Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and beyond, decision makers seized the opportunity to link the municipal airport with Charing Cross Road access at the 401. This opened more opportunity as both business and air travelers took advantage of a revamped airport with added service amenities supporting its growing demand. Modeling the great success that neighboring London had with its interchange proximity to the airport, Economic Development attracted industry and commerce on a large scale; selling DIVERSE ACCESS as added value of locating in Chatham-Kent.

THIS Chatham-Kent IS possible. It will take many difficult decisions, many risks and investing countless hours of hard effort, but, it will be WORTH IT.

We all appreciate the amazing quality of life Chatham-Kent offers. That very element has been touted nationally and enticed new residents – something surely to be proud of. Yet, we have the potential to be SO much more than a community to simply live and play in. Now is the time to take action and elevate to our full potential – to prove that Chatham-Kent is also Open for Business.

Our ask of today’s Council is - Be the Change. Be the change we need to foster this ‘Chatham-Kent of 2040’. Now is the time to be visionary, innovative and future-focused. Be the Council that made the right decisions for growth in Chatham-Kent. Thank You for envisioning with us.

*Cecily Coppola*, Chair  
Board of Directors